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- 15.—*Life and Correspondence of James Iredell, one of the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States.* By GRIFFITH J. M^CREE. New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1857. 2 vols. 8vo. pp. 570, 605.

THE people of North Carolina have shown themselves slow to commemorate—shall we conclude slow to appreciate also?—the merits of the great men whose lives have given its brightest lustre to her name. Of the long catalogue of able and distinguished men she has borne and nurtured, to how few has any memorial been erected! In the last volume of Sparks's *American Biography* is a memoir of General William R. Davie. A little later appeared Carruthers's *Life of David Caldwell*. We have seen also an almost worthless sketch of the career of Nathaniel Macon. Besides these, we do not remember to have seen a memoir of any of the worthies of North Carolina, beyond such meagre accounts as might befit the columns of a newspaper or a magazine,—saving only the materials for biographies, rather than biographies, that are accumulated in *Wheeler's History*. Yet the men of that State speak proudly, and may well speak proudly, of such ancestors as Harnett and Johnson and Caswell and Hooper, and the heroes of Mecklenburg, and of Stanly and Gaston of later times; while no one stirs a finger to rescue their memory from the uncertainties of tradition, or from utter oblivion. The few works we have named above, all of which are comparatively recent, may be thought to indicate the awakening of a better feeling; and are, we trust, the first in a series of efforts to do justice to those high-minded and noble men, to whom that State owes so much, and whom it is to her discredit that she has so long neglected or forgotten. The *Life of Mr. Justice Iredell*, now before us, is another worthy contribution in the same direction.

The life of Mr. Iredell was by no means an eventful one; yet his talents made him a man of mark in his own region, and his active habits and excellences of character gave him great influence over those who came within his sphere. He was born in England in 1751, and, coming to North Carolina while yet a mere lad, found in the unsettled condition of the country during the times of the Revolution, and the gradual progress of society which ensued, the best possible conditions for success and prosperity. He early devoted himself to the profession of the law, and while yet a young man acquired a very enviable reputation for legal skill and learning. As early as 1777, when only twenty-six years old, he was placed on the bench of the Superior Court of North Carolina, a position which, however, he soon resigned. Among the leaders in the Revolutionary movements in that Colony, few were

more active than he, and few labored more effectively. Though the youngest of their number, he was the sharer of all their plans, and his blended boldness and caution, and his clear political foresight, rendered his assistance invaluable. He seems never to have been what may be called a popular man. He did not seek to operate directly on the masses of his countrymen, and, we imagine, had little familiarity with the details of political manœuvres. But he certainly had great power over leading minds. In 1779 he was appointed Attorney-General of the State by Governor Caswell, and held that post for several years. In the Convention which first met to deliberate on the adoption of the Federal Constitution, he was the most conspicuous among the debaters, and foremost, in a body which contained many remarkable men, for learning, genius, and eloquence, and for the earnestness with which, though in vain, he advocated its ratification. Yet he devoted his best efforts to his profession. In 1779 was published a work of great labor, which he prepared under a commission from the government of the State, a thorough and complete revisal of the laws of North Carolina. In 1790 his high legal attainments were recognized and rewarded in his appointment, by President Washington, to the office of Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. This office he continued to hold till his death, in 1799, and discharged its high functions with signal ability and universal commendation.

These volumes are, on the whole, edited with great skill. The larger part of them is occupied by the letters of Mr. Iredell and his correspondents, which are of much interest. They run through a period of more than thirty years, the most exciting and important in the history of our nation, and everywhere throw light on the movement of public events, while they give us many glimpses of the state of society, the domestic politics, and the characters of public men, in North Carolina. Many of them, too, are racy, idiomatic, and extremely well written. Most of the men then prominent in that State are thus presented to us, by their own disclosure of themselves, or by the portraiture of their neighbors. To each chapter the editor has prefixed a condensed summary of the important events of the period, and in foot-notes has given all needful statements as to persons and things referred to in the text. With a style rather too ambitious, perhaps, and language of which the good taste may be sometimes doubted, he is always clear and forcible. He is evidently very cautious in regard to his facts, and in general his statements are to be relied on for their accuracy; and this in spite of evident traces, here and there, of local and personal feeling.